

June 28, 2023

Board of Commissioners of Cook County
Human Relations Committee

Dear Members of the Human Relations Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to provide public testimony. My name is Tim Wang and I am the Director of Policy and Advocacy at Howard Brown Health, the largest LGBTQ+ community health center in the Midwest US. We provide comprehensive healthcare for over 35,000 patients annually, and about 20% of our patients are trans/non-binary/gender nonconforming. We are a proud provider of gender affirming care, and that is why we strongly support proposed resolution 23-2007, A Resolution in Support of Access to Gender Affirming Care, and proposed resolution 23-3023, A Resolution in Support of Non-Conforming Gender Expression.

Across the country, political extremists have launched a coordinated legislative assault on the human rights of transgender people, including the right to access necessary and lifesaving healthcare. These healthcare bans are rooted in transphobic myths and misinformation. As providers of gender affirming care, we know the truth. We see everyday how access to gender affirming care saves lives. One of our patients said, "For me, accessing gender affirming care was not only a big step towards feeling more comfortable in my skin and safe in my day-to-day life. But also, being able to come into a medical space and feel seen and respected made it suddenly more possible for me to address a laundry list of other health issues I'd been ignoring or avoiding. I felt like I could now actually seek out care for my chronic conditions without having my personhood disrespected."

This patient's experience is incredible, and so many patients share her story. In fact, decades of scientific research has shown that gender affirming care is linked with reduced rates of suicidality, depression, anxiety, and dysphoria and higher levels of life satisfaction and overall well-being. That is why every major medical organization in the country, including the American Medical Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics, supports access to gender affirming care. Gender affirming care bans completely disregard experts in the field and the needs of the trans community.

As providers, we adhere to clinical guidance and best practices that are informed by medical experts and that center above all else patient safety and autonomy. Gender affirming care encompasses a wide spectrum of medical, behavioral, and social services, and we work collaboratively with patients to ensure that they fully understand all their options so that we can tailor a treatment plan that meets their needs and is appropriate for each stage of life. There is no one-size fits all model of care, and some people may not want any medical intervention at all, which is completely valid. The notion that anyone is getting

gender affirming services forced upon them without their understanding or consent is a false representation of what gender affirming care is. In reality, even aside from gender affirming care bans, it's all too often still a struggle for trans people to access care due to lack of knowledgeable providers, burdensome prior authorization, lack of insurance coverage, and other barriers.

Everyone deserves to be able to access necessary healthcare and to present as their authentic selves. As our neighbors in the Midwest continue to advance harmful anti-trans legislation, these resolutions send a strong message of support and provide a basis for ongoing work to protect and uplift trans people in Cook County. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Tim Wang
Director of Policy and Advocacy